

RAND Standards for High-Quality and Objective Research and Analysis



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describes how RAND’s research embodies the organization’s core values of quality and objectivity. The standards should be evident in the conduct of our research and analysis and in our research products. They substantiate our commitment to producing high-caliber, high-utility policy research and analysis.

First launched in 1997, the standards were updated in 1999, 2003, 2009, and, most recently, in 2022. In the latest revision, the standards draw greater attention to relevance and new attention to transparency, legitimacy, engagement, and inclusion. The wording of the standards has been streamlined and modified so that the standards can be applied to both research products and research activities throughout the project life cycle. The 2022 revision was informed by studies on research quality¹ and extensive input from the RAND community.

The 2022 standards are framed as commitments to principles and actions that advance quality. They are mutually reinforcing, albeit with some intentional overlap among them. The standards are coupled with guidance about how to apply them in the review of research products, at project kick-off, and during in-progress review. This guidance helps harmonize our quality assurance and other research-support activities across project life cycles.

We revisit these standards periodically based on information collected from within and outside RAND.

¹ Brian M. Belcher, Katherine E. Rasmussen, Matthew R. Kemshaw, and Deborah A. Zornes, “Defining and Assessing Research Quality in a Transdisciplinary Context,” *Research Evaluation*, Vol. 25, No. 1, January 2016, pp. 1–17.

This revision was informed less directly by Bridget C. O’Brien, Ilene B. Harris, Thomas J. Beckman, Darcy A. Reed, and David A. Cook, “Standards for Reporting Qualitative Research: A Synthesis of Recommendations,” *Academic Medicine*, Vol. 89, No. 9, 2014, pp. 1245–1251.

We interact with those who have a stake in how our research is conducted, interpreted, and applied.

Engagement

We seek to inform and influence effective and timely solutions to important policy problems.

Relevance

We explain our research, analysis, findings, and recommendations in ways that are understandable and usable.

Transparency



Inclusion

We intentionally include all important perspectives throughout the research process.



Rigor

We conduct objective analyses grounded in a clear purpose using sound logic and the most-appropriate theories, methods, and data sources available.



Legitimacy

We conduct research ethically, avoid conflicts of interest, and maintain independence and objectivity.

Engagement

We interact with those who have a stake in how our research is conducted, interpreted, and applied.

ENGAGEMENT

- ▷ contributes to a better understanding of the problem and its context, as well as a robust research design
- ▷ informs the assessment of possible solutions and lays the groundwork for successful implementation
- ▷ involves seeking out and engaging a variety of relevant, diverse perspectives to support rigor; guards against unintended bias as we design, conduct, and disseminate our research; and ensures that our findings are relevant and understood by key stakeholders
- ▷ ensures that RAND research is accessible, whenever possible, to a diverse group of stakeholders beyond those who request or sponsor the research, act on its recommendations, or undertake its implementation
- ▷ can occur throughout the research life cycle through formal and informal activities, such as discussions, interviews, focus groups, surveys, advisory panels, presentations, and community meetings.

Inclusion

We intentionally include all important perspectives throughout the research process.

INCLUSION

- ▷ focuses on obtaining and accounting for a variety of important perspectives throughout the research process in order to objectively balance them in a fair manner
- ▷ promotes awareness about the full spectrum of scientific and policy perspectives on complex issues
- ▷ ensures that these varied perspectives are treated fairly throughout the research process, portrayed accurately, and weighed according to evidence
- ▷ incorporates important perspectives not only through diversifying the composition of research teams but also through engaging numerous other parties in projects, including reviewers, partners, and stakeholders
- ▷ enhances the ability of research teams to understand the policy context and the generalizability of findings and conclusions.

Relevance

We seek to inform and influence effective and timely solutions to important policy problems.

RELEVANCE

- ▷ focuses on the usefulness and significance of research and analysis and the potential for impact
- ▷ comprises many research characteristics, including *important*, *useful*, *timely*, *actionable*, *practicable*, *applicable*, *feasible*, *innovative*, *adaptable*, and *impactful*
- ▷ requires that research teams articulate the scope and purpose of research to ensure that the work is timely, feasible, and useful
- ▷ might demand that research teams adapt elements of their research plans—such as research questions, data sources, and methods—to new information or changing circumstances.

Rigor

We conduct objective analyses grounded in a clear purpose using sound logic and the most-appropriate theories, methods, and data sources available.

RIGOR

- ▷ focuses on doing good, replicable science to uncover facts and insights that enable evidence-based decisionmaking, help unify stakeholders, and galvanize implementation efforts
- ▷ is guided by a clear purpose and well-formulated questions. Rigorous research generates *findings* that are grounded in sound approaches that make sense according to the purpose and questions. These approaches might involve the application of tried-and-true methods, new ideas, or experimentation. *Implications* and *recommendations* follow logically from these findings
- ▷ comprises many research characteristics, including *valid, reliable, credible, systematic, creative, compelling, logical, state-of-the-art, innovative, authoritative, robust, replicable, defensible, and adaptable*
- ▷ requires RAND researchers to stay current with and possibly contribute to advances in theories, methods, and data sources.

Transparency

We explain our research, analysis, findings, and recommendations in ways that are understandable and usable.

TRANSPARENCY

- ▷ focuses on the sufficient, effective, and appropriate documentation and communication of the research process (design, development, execution, and support) and research outcomes (findings and recommendations)
- ▷ comprises many research characteristics, including *accountability, reporting, replicability, and data-sharing*
- ▷ requires that research teams document and report their purpose, scope, sources of support, assumptions, activities, data, methods, results, limitations, findings, and policy recommendations clearly and to the greatest extent feasible to meet the needs of those who manage, evaluate, use, replicate, and might be affected by the research
- ▷ can be supported by supplementary products, such as research plans, protocols, tools, code, data sets, reports, presentations, infographics, translations, and videos
- ▷ calls for RAND documents and other products to have a clear purpose, be accessible and easily located, and be useful and tailored to their intended audiences.

Legitimacy

We conduct research ethically, avoid conflicts of interest, and maintain independence and objectivity.

LEGITIMACY

- ▷ focuses on the ethical, fair, independent, and objective conduct of research
- ▷ contributes to the validity, credibility, reception, and uptake of research
- ▷ is supported by institutional principles, policies, procedures, and oversight bodies
- ▷ is further advanced through authentic familiarity with stakeholder values and norms and by attention to diversity, equity, and inclusion in all aspects of the research.



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